



Equines in the revised animal welfare legislation

Policy briefing

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Equines in the revised animal welfare legislation

Background

Equines, meaning horses, asses, mules and hinnies, have varied status within the EU. They can be used for multiple purposes including companionship, leisure, sports, production or work. Sometimes, they fulfil more than one of these roles in their lifetime. Although bred for these other roles, many are subsequently used for meat production purposes. This situation means that equines often fall between the lines of legislation and are not adequately protected. The objective of this briefing is to define the modalities for inclusion of equines within the different instruments forming the revised animal welfare legislation.

The revised animal welfare legislation currently being drafted by the European Commission consists in four pieces of legislation:

Regulation on Kept Animals for commercial purposes	Replacing and widening the scope of Directive 98/58/EC	Minimum welfare requirements for farm and other animals used or traded for commercial purposes.
Regulation on transport	Replacing Regulation No 1/2005	Rules for the transport of animals intra EU, and ideally extra EU, including animals transported within third countries but consumed in the EU.
Regulation on the protection of animals at the time of killing	Replacing Regulation No 1099/2009	Requirements to protect animals at slaughter that apply to all animals consumed in the EU, even when they are slaughtered in third countries.
Regulation on animal welfare labelling	New piece of legislation	Framework to inform EU consumers on welfare conditions of animal products they consume.

The revised legislation offers the opportunity to include the majority of equines within the scope of EU legislation and maximise their protection.

Kept animals for commercial purposes

The current EU legal framework fails at providing minimum requirements for the care of Equidae. Directive 98/58/EC lays down standards for farm animals, and it explicitly excludes animals intended for use in competitions, shows, cultural or sporting events or activities. The Directive clearly applies to some equines used for farming purposes, such as donkeys used for milk production. The main EU provisions related to equines relate to traceability within the framework of the Animal Health Law to safeguard public health. The reviewed Regulation on animals kept for commercial purposes therefore offers an opportunity to enlarge the current scope of these rules and ensure a wider number of Equidae are protected.

All equines traded for the purposes of human companionship, sports and/or leisure or for being kept in a household, should be assumed to be kept for commercial purposes. These include, equids used for the production of milk, in the leisure industry for example in riding schools, for sporting purposes, for equine-assisted therapy or working equids used in tourism, agriculture, forestry, and waste management, among others. The revised animal welfare legislation should address key concerns with regards to the care of equine animals, regardless of their purpose.

eCG

The production of the hormone eCG (also known as PMSG) is raising serious animal welfare concerns that should be addressed in the revised animal welfare legislation. eCG production has been defined as use for scientific purposes in line with Directive 2010/63/EU. However, this industry is motivated by commercial rather than by research interests. Indeed, the owners of the mares sell the blood at a very high price. In this context, eCG production should also be considered within the regulation aiming at protecting animals used for commercial purposes.

In addition, the use of eCG in farm animals also entails serious concerns for the welfare of these animals, along with the use of other hormones to increase productivity. For this reason, the revised legislation should prohibit the production, use and import of eCG in the EU.

Other relevant provisions

The inclusion of equines kept for commercial purposes within the scope of the Regulation means that the management, care and use of these animals will have to comply with the Five Domains. Specific recommendations cover, among others, species-specific requirements on space allowances, lighting regimes, substrates or shelter from weather and environmental conditions.

These requirements should align to the [Guides, developed by the Voluntary Initiative on responsible ownership and care of Equidae](#) acknowledged by the EU Platform on animal welfare, on the good animal welfare practices for the keeping, care, training and use of horses, and donkeys and donkey hybrids.

Transport

Transport can be stressful for equines. Hence, it is essential to ensure transport conditions are science-based and protect the health and welfare of the animals. Regulation No 1/2005 has proven to be not fit for purpose, difficult to enforce and contains loopholes on technical requirements that hinders the compliance of provisions. This includes requirements for the transport of Equidae. Therefore, the Regulation should include species-specific requirements for the transport of Equidae. For more information, the [White Paper Live animal transport: time to change](#) the rules lists proposed provisions to improve the welfare of equines during transport.

The majority of horse meat consumed in the EU is imported from third countries, it is essential to ensure that welfare requirements applicable to equines - in terms of transport, and slaughter in the EU, are also applicable to operators transporting and slaughtering equines whose meat is consumed in the EU. As equines are not raised for meat production, it remains difficult to ask for equines to be kept and bred in EU-approved establishments. Similarly to the current legislation providing that animals whose meat is exported to the EU should be slaughtered in EU-approved slaughterhouses, these animals should also be transported by EU-approved operators to EU-approved assembly centres, regularly controlled with unannounced EU audits.

Protection of animals at the time of killing

Eurogroup for Animals acknowledges the fact that a number of equines are slaughtered at the end of their career for a number of different reasons. In this context, equines should be included within the scope of the revised legislation on slaughter. In addition, the majority of horse meat consumed in the EU is imported from third countries that should comply with EU standards at the time of killing. For these reasons, it is crucial to ensure that equines are protected at the time of killing, in line with all other animals whose products are destined for export to the EU. The enforcement of these provisions must be controlled with regular unannounced audits conducted by EU authorities.

All relevant provisions promoted by Eurogroup for Animals should apply to equines slaughtered in the EU and in EU-approved slaughterhouses in third countries. Read [Eurogroup for Animals position on Animal welfare at the time of killing and slaughter](#) for more information on these recommendations.

As mentioned above, equine meat consumed in the EU generally comes from animals that are not raised for this purpose, whether the animal was reared in the EU or third countries. The large spectrum of purposes equines are raised for makes it difficult to clearly define general requirements and indicators to develop a labelling system aiming at measuring the welfare of these animals.

However, we encourage the inclusion of equines within the discussions on animal welfare labelling to establish multiple criteria that could be used to assess the conditions in which these animals have been reared, including the length of the supply chain.

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